

S. 2655, the Ensuring Forensic Care for All Victims Act

Senator Murkowski (R-AK) and Senator Hickenlooper (D-CO) introduced the *Ensuring Forensic Care for all Victims Act*. This legislation authorizes demonstration grants based off of the Alaska Comprehensive Training Forensic Academy (ACTFA). The purpose of this Act is to create funding opportunities through national demonstration grants to develop trauma-informed standards of care that promote generalist forensic medical training tailored to meet health care professional and first responder needs. This legislation provides the opportunity for all providers (from EMS, RN, school nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, CHAPs in Alaskan rural villages, and physicians) to receive a generalist medical forensic education in order to ensure all patients who have experienced violence/trauma have access to services. While this training would not replace specialized SANE or child advocacy training, it would ensure there are health care providers in rural communities who are able to provide basic medical forensic services to all victims of violence.

The University of Alaska Anchorage's College of Health, the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA) and the Alaska Nurses Association collaborated in March 2019 to launch the Alaska Comprehensive Forensic Training Academy (ACFTA), a training for comprehensive forensic documentation and evaluation that is the first of its kind in the nation. Alaska has one of the highest rates of interpersonal violence in the country, it is important to focus on broad, comprehensive assessments and care for all victims of violent crime. The generalist forensic medical education program is designed to provide an evidence-based and trauma-informed care approach: Instead of simply treating and releasing a victim, a healthcare provider who is trained can more comprehensively evaluate a patient, document evidence with an awareness of forensic principles, and connect the patient to community resources.

Additionally, educating providers to provide baseline forensic medical services will increase community awareness of occurrences of violence that are not reported, investigated and, when warranted, prosecuted. Building community capacity to respond to violence is especially important for small communities with limited human and fiscal resources. In rural America, many communities cannot sustain a specialized sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) or a sexual assault forensic examiner, but have established health care, law enforcement, and advocacy roles. If the one health provider in a community is trained broadly to respond to many forms of violence and understands how to work with law enforcement and advocates, there is a better chance that victims of violence (beyond those who are sexually assaulted) will be appropriately treated, and that forensic evidence will be collected to assist in the pursuit of justice.

The *Ensuring Forensic Care for all Victims Act* would:

- Authorize \$11 million a year for four years through HRSA at HHS in conjunction with OVC at DOJ for demonstration grants to the support clinical training of health care providers to administer medical forensic examinations and treatments to survivors of interpersonal violence of all ages.
- Directs the Secretary of HHS to establish a State and forensic provider technical resource center to provide TA to health care providers and community health aides to increase the quality of, and access to generalist forensic services by entering into contracts with national experts, such as the Academy of Forensic Nurses (AFN).
- Requires a national report to be submitted to Congress on the need throughout the United States and territories for increased access to generalist medical forensic services, evidence collection, and documentation that aids meeting the needs of healthcare patients as well as improves future law enforcement investigation and prosecution.

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